DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 037 PS 025 099

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TITLE Effects of Teacher Attachment History on Teacher-Child Relationships.
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attachment Behavior; Caregiver Child Relationship; Child Development; Dependency (Personality); Early Experience; Higher Education; Parent Child Relationship; Preschool Education; Social Development; Teacher Influence; Teacher Response; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Security of Attachment

ABSTRACT

Attachment theory posits that intimate relationships (especially during early childhood) have an influence on future social functioning. Children construct an "internal working model" of a relationship which is influenced by the nature and quality of primary attachment relationships. This model then serves as a foundation for future relationships. This study explored the influence of teachers' attachment history on the type of attachment relationships they develop with children in their class. Subjects were 31 graduate-level student teachers and 51 preschool-age children. Teachers completed the self-report Attachment History Questionnaire, and after field placement with the children, completed the Student-Teacher Relationship Scales. Results provided some evidence of a relationship between a teacher's childhood attachment experiences and the quality of relationships that develop between teacher and child. Essentially, these data suggested that those teachers who had a more secure attachment history had relationships with students characterized by less dependency. However, the fact that the attachment history subscales had limited predictive ability and that the model accounted for only 28 percent of the variance indicates that there were more factors at work in this outcome. (EV)

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ED 404 037

Effects of Teacher Attachment History on Teacher-Child Relationships

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Running head: TEACHER ATTACHMENT HISTORY

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Research on children's social development suggests that the adult-child relationship is an important context for children's development. Data indicates that the quality of children's intimate relationships with parents is predictive of their social adjustment and academic achievement in school (e.g., Cohn, 1990). In addition to parents, children's teachers often becomes a significant figure in a young child's life. The teacher spends a substantial amount of time with the child each day, assuming many of the same roles as parents. Yet, little is known about the effects of this relationship on children's development. However, the research that has been done in this area indicates that teacher-child relationships may have their own unique influence on children's development (Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton 1994).

Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory has been utilized extensively as a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of parent-child relationships, and has recently been utilized in research on caregiver-child relationships (Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton 1994). Attachment theory posits that intimate relationships (especially in early childhood) have an influence on future social functioning. Children construct an "internal working model" of the relationship which is influenced by the nature and quality of primary attachment relationships. This model then serves as a foundation for future relationships.

Quality of the internal working model is defined in large part by the degree to which the caregiver has been able to sensitively and appropriately respond to the attachment needs of the child. Sensitive caregivers allow the individual to develop a "secure" internal working model. Conversely, children that receive inconsistent, or rejecting care develop "insecure" internal working models. These models act as a "lens" for all other attachment relationships. Thus, children with a secure internal working models will perceive others as supportive, available when needed, and able to satisfy their attachment needs. Children with insecure working models put little trust is put into the ability of others to provide the nurturing, and

support needed to satisfy attachment needs.

Additionally, children use the attachment figure as a "secure base" from which to explore and learn about the world. Exploration into the world is hampered by an insecure attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment needs dominate at the expense of exploratory needs. Thus, when attachment needs are not met, exploration and learning suffer.

Little is known regarding the transition from relationships within the family to those outside of the family as occur in the home to school transition. It is generally believed that there is a continuity in the type of attachment relationships the child develops. That is, children securely attached to the parent would most likely develop a secure relationship with the teacher. Pianta (1994) suggests that school-aged children negotiates the social demands of school through attachment relationships. Children bring their internal working model of attachment relationships to their classroom relationships with teachers. As the new relationship forms between teacher and children, the child's expectations of how sensitive and supportive this new attachment figure will be is based on the internal working model from with they are operating. Thus, children with a secure internal working model are more likely to develop a secure relationship with his/her teacher and use them as a "secure base" for exploration and learning. Therefore the child-teacher relationship can have an impact on the child's success in school.

Teacher's Attachment History and Attachment Relationships

A critical aspect in any attachment relationship is the attitudes and behavior of the individual regarding their role as an attachment figure. As mentioned previously, the sensitivity and appropriateness of caregiving behaviors is central to the quality of the attachment relationship that forms between attachment figure and child (Bowlby, 1969). The teacher's ability to perceive and respond appropriately to the child's attachment needs is critical in determining the quality of the relationship that develops. As in parent-child attachments the teacher's attachment history plays a critical role in how the teacher

approaches relationships. How teachers perceive a student's attachment needs is based in large part on the internal model they have developed in regard to this relationship (Pianta, & Steinberg, 1992). The teachers' own attachment history will influence how they perceive the attachment needs of their students. Teachers with a secure attachment history will be more likely to understand and value their role in this relationship with their students and will be better able to meet the attachment needs of a children adjusting to school.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the influence of the teacher's attachment history on the type of attachment relationships they develop with the children in their class. Associations between teacher's past attachment history and the quality of their attachment relationships with their students will be examined.

Methods

Sample

Subjects were 31 graduate level student-teachers and 51 preschool age children. All student-teachers had an undergraduate degree in a field other than education and were in an alternative preparation program in a large urban university in the southeast United States. Ninety percent were female (n=29) and 10% were male (n=2). The mean age of the sample was 28 years. Nineteen percent of the sample was African American (n=6), 77% was Caucasian (n=24), and 3% (n=3) was some other race. Fifty-eight percent of this sample was single and the remaining 42% was married.

The children who participated had a mean age of 52 months, and 69% Caucasian (n=35) 20% were African American, 6% Hispanic and 5% Asian-American. Fifty-one percent were female and 49% male. A complete demographic profile on children and student-teachers can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Procedure

Student-teachers of children in the study participated in data collection in two phases. Student teachers completed a self-report Attachment History Questionnaire (AHQ) (Pottharst and Kessler, 1990) which assessed their own attachment history prior to their field placement. After competing a field placement with preschool-aged children, student-teachers were asked to complete Student-Teacher Relationship Scales (STRS) (Pianta, 1992) using 5 children chosen at random from their field placement as the focus of each STRS. The result was 51 observations of relationships with children from the student-teachers. The instruments for this study consisted of two measures chosen for their psychometric properties as well as their relevance to attachment theory. They are discussed below:

The Attachment History Questionnaire (AHQ). The AHQ (Pottharst & Kessler, 1990) is a measure designed to examine the childhood history of the individual in regard to attachment issues. This measure covers topics that are relevant to childhood attachment experiences such as separations, threatened separations, parental discipline, parent-child interactions and peer relationships. The respondent rated how often his parents engaged in the behaviors described on a seven-point Likert-type format, ranging from "never" to "always". The scores were analyzed according to four factor based subscales identified as (a) secure attachment base, (b) parental discipline, (c) threats of separation, and (d) peer affectional support. These subscales represent fundamental attachment concepts that have a significant relationship to the quality of early attachment relationships. Secure attachment base focuses on the general security of the relationship between parent and child. Parental discipline focuses on the nature and severity of discipline encounters (e.g., verbal discipline, spanking, physical abuse). The threats of separation subscale focus is on the incidence of actual and threatened separation in childhood. Peer affectional support focuses on the history of peer relationships and how parents reacted to peers. Cronbach alpha coefficients for this group were .92 for the secure base subscale, .85 for the parental

discipline subscale, .88 for the separation subscale, and .47 for the peer affiliation subscale.

Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). The STRS (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992) is a 30 item self-report measure designed to assess a teacher's feelings about his/her relationship with a particular student, the student's interactive behavior, and how the teacher thinks the student feels about him/her. The measure yields 5 factor-based subscales: (a) conflict/anger, (b) warmth, (c) open communication, (d) dependency, and (e) troubled feelings. The conflict/anger subscale examines conflictual relationships with students that may evoke anger in the teacher. The warmth subscale deals with issues in the relationship that deal with positive feelings about the child and vice versa (e.g, emotional and physical affection). The open communication subscale deals with the quality of communication between teacher and child, focusing on the quality of mutual non-verbal communications between teacher and child. The dependency subscale focuses on the issue of the child being overly dependent on the teacher. Troubled feelings deals with disturbing feelings from both the child and teacher regarding the relationship (e.g., rejection by the child, or teacher preoccupation with the child). There is also a total scale score that is formulated by reversing negatively worded items and summing all items. Thus, a higher total score indicates a more positive relationship. Internal reliabilities for this measure based on Chronbach's alpha were .64, .84, .65, .63, and .23 respectively.

Results

Univariate Analyses

All AHQ subscales were correlated with all subscales of the STRS. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix. Certain AHQ subscales were significantly correlated with certain STRS subscales. The secure base subscale from the AHQ was negatively related to the STRS subscale that measured "dependent" relationships with students ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$). Also, the "separation" subscale of the AHQ was positively related to the dependent subscale of the STRS ($r = .30$, $p < .05$).

Table 2 about here

In order to determine if individuals high in dependent relationships were significantly different from those low in dependent relationships on the AHQ subscales t-tests were performed with dichotomized dependent subscale of the STRS. The results of this t-test indicated a significant difference in a history of a secure attachment base between individuals high and those low in dependent relationships ($t(49) = 2.08$, $p < .05$). There were no significant differences between individuals high and low in dependent relationships on the separation subscale of the AHQ, although results approached statistical significance ($t(49) = -1.84$, $p < .10$)

Multivariate Analyses

Five regression analyses were utilized to examine the ability of the attachment history variables to predict the quality of the teacher-student relationship as measured by the subscales of the STRS. The student-teachers' attachment history questionnaire subscales were entered into a simultaneous regression models with each of the STRS subscales as dependent variables. The troubled feelings subscale of the STRS was not included in these analyses because of extremely low reliability.

One significant model emerged. In the model with the "dependent" subscale of the STRS as the dependent variable, secure base, and peer affectional support subscales of the AHQ were significant predictors. The multiple correlation, ($R = .53$) indicated that this model accounted for 28% of the variance ($f = 2.94$, $p < .05$)(See Table 3).

Table 3 about here

Discussion

The results of this study provide some evidence of a relationship between a teacher's childhood attachment experiences and the quality of relationships that develop between teacher and child. Essentially, these data suggest that those teachers that had a more secure attachment history had relationships with students that were characterized by less dependency. The secure base subscale, which predicted dependency in teacher-child relationships in this sample, measures the overall security of the relationship between parent and child. Attachment theory research indicates that individuals who lack this secure relationship have a difficult time socially and academically(Cohn, 1990). Additionally, a history of more peer affectional support predicted less dependent attachment relationships between student-teachers and students when in a model with a history of secure attachment base. Although separation was related to dependency in teacher-child relationships it was not a significant predictor in the model with dependency as the dependent variable.

These data suggest the long lasting positive effects of a secure attachment history with parents. Individuals with a secure attachment history would be more likely to have more secure relationships with others (i.e., higher peer affectional support) and, without traumatic interference, would continue this tendency. It appears that this trend towards more secure relationships extends into relationships with children in the classroom.

The research to date in the area of teacher-child relationships has indicated that the quality of the relationship that develops between child and teacher has an impact on social and academic functioning (Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton 1994; Pianta, 1994). This study adds to this literature by describing how the teacher's attachment history affects the teacher-child relationship. However, the fact that the attachment history subscales had limited predictive ability and that the model only accounted for twenty-eight percent of the variance indicates that there are more factors at work in this relationship.

These findings must be interpreted cautiously due to some limitations in this study. First, the small sample size limits the inferences made by the statistical analyses. Second, the teacher in this study had a short amount of time to develop relationships with students. They were placed in these classrooms for five weeks. Subsequent longitudinal research (over an entire year or several years) with larger samples are necessary to determine if the findings in this study can be replicated. More detailed analysis of the interactions that occur between a teacher and the children in his/her class is needed to more fully understand these relationships. Additionally, more measures of the teacher's current attachment status is necessary to assess the continuity of attachment's effect on the individual.

The child-teacher attachment relationship needs further study to understand how it develops and affects children's behavior and academic performance in school. Teacher attachment history is only one piece of a larger picture of teacher-child relationships, and more detailed study is needed to understand the dynamics of these relationships.

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Table 1. Means and Frequencies of Selected Demographic Variables for Children and Student Teachers

Children:

Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Frequency	Percentage
Caucasian	35	68%
African American	10	20%
Hispanic	3	6%
Asian American	3	6%

Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	25	49%
Female	26	51%

Age Mean age: 52 months (11.3 months)

Student-Teachers:

Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Frequency	Percentage
Caucasian	24	78%
African American	6	19%
Other	1	3%

Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	29	94%
Female	2	6%

Marital Status

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	18	58%
Single	13	42%

Age Mean age: 28 years (6.1 years)

Note: Standard deviations are shown in parentheses following means.

Table 2
Correlation Matrix (Pearson r of Selected Attachment Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Conflict-Anger	1.0 n=51								
2. Open Communication	-.31* n=51	1.0 n=51							
3. Warmth	-.42** n=51	.64*** n=51	1.0 n=51						
4. Dependency	.19 n=51	.16 n=51	.25 n=51	1.0 n=51					
5. Troubled Feelings	.13 n=51	-.18 n=51	-.05 n=51	-.01 n=51	1.0 n=51				
6. Secure Base History	-.11 n=51	-.20 n=51	-.21 n=51	-.45** n=51	-.09 n=51	1.0 n=51			
7. Separation History	.03 n=51	.09 n=51	.16 n=51	.30* n=51	-.06 n=51	-.80*** n=51	1.0 n=51		
8. Parental Discipline History	.02 n=51	.19 n=51	.19 n=51	-.05 n=51	-.12 n=51	-.10 n=51	-.14 n=51	1.0 n=51	
9 Peer Affiliation History	.07 n=51	-.10 n=51	.08 n=51	-.32 n=51	.07 n=51	.17 n=51	-.14 n=51	.63** n=51	1.0 n=51

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

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Table 3.
Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis of Dependency and Selected Attachment History Independent Variables

Variable	B	SE B	β
Secure Base History	-.08	.02	-.72*
Parental Separation History	-.07	.06	-.22
Parental Discipline History	-.04	.05	-.17
Peer Affiliation History	.14	.07	.29*

Multiple R=.53

R^2= .28

* $p < .05$